

READINGS IN SOCIAL AND ISLAMIC ISSUES

JAMIL FAROOQUI



IIUM Press
International Islamic University Malaysia

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Edited by
Jamil Farooqui



IIUM Press

Published by:
IIUM Press
International Islamic University Malaysia

Copy no: 11251293
Initial: AAR
Date: 21/5/12
Location: MAIN / PJ / ISTAC / NILAI / 0151
First Edition, 2012
IIUM Press, IIUM

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Readings in social and Islamic issues / edited by Jamil Farooqui

Include index

ISBN 978-967-418-213-7

I. Islam & State--Malaysia. II. Knowledge, theory of (Islam).

1. Farooqui, Jamil

297.09595

ISBN: 978-967-418-213-7

Member of Majlis Penerbitan Ilmiah Malaysia — MAPIM
(Malaysian Scholarly Publishing Council)

Printed by:
IIUM Printing Sdn. Bhd.
No. 1, Jalan Industri Batu Caves 1/3
Taman Perindustrian Batu Caves
68100 Batu Caves
Selangor Darul Ehsan
Website : www.iiumprinting.com

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MALAYSIAN WOMEN IN EDUCATION, MARRIAGE AND THE WORKFORCE (1957-2008)

Rohaiza Rokis*

Introduction

Traditionally, Malaysian women have been involved in public activities. However, wars and upheavals, particularly in the early twentieth century, retarded their active participation in the country. After gaining independence in 1957, women's status and position started to improve. The 1970s were the point when many women got involved in employment. The establishment of many factories by international companies together with the New Economic Policy (NEP) by the Malaysian Government further encouraged women into the workforce.

In this paper, I focus on the life of women in Malaysia under the forces of colonialism and industrialism. The focal discussion here is to disclose the historical development of Malaysian women in education and employment, as well as marriage. How has education changed the position of Malaysian women? How has the workforce transformation affected women? What were women's issues in dealing with employment and the household?

Women and Education in Malaysia

Before the coming of the British in the eighteenth century, education was taught by religious teachers. These religious schools or *sekolah pondok* taught pupils to recite the Qur'an in Arabic and to read and write in *Jawi*, the Malay script. These schools were very popular among the majority of the general Malay population due to their close attachment to the Islamic teachings. More male students were sent to

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